



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **TESTING:** Increasing attacks on standardized and high stakes tests are largely centered around upper income areas like Scarsdale, New York, where parents and students are boycotting the New York State Regents exam. The efforts may raise the self-esteem of students who would probably do well under any circumstances but, if successful, the attacks on testing will do serious damage to those least able to afford reversals - poor and minority students.

A report issued by The Business Roundtable concludes that, "high academic standards, regular testing, and rigorous accountability have raised student achievement in Texas, particularly among African-American, Latino, and low-income students." The report goes on to note dramatic decreases in racial and socioeconomic gaps on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, and that the state's African-American students matched or outscored white students in seven other states on the 1998 NAEP writing test - a first for NAEP. To find out more, go to: www.brtable.org.

The results are echoed in Prince George's County, Maryland, where consistently poor performance on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills by the county's largely minority and predominantly poor student population moved Superintendent Iris Metts to go "back to basics," such as teaching second graders how to frame words into sentences and how to add, subtract and divide. This year's CTBS results show 34 percent of the county schools scoring at or above the national average, up dramatically from 21 percent last year. Sixty-three percent of the county schools posted significant gains.

And in New York City, fourth graders made slightly larger gains in reading this year than those statewide. Although continuing to lag far behind white students, since the test was introduced, the number of black and Hispanic students reading at or above grade level statewide has risen steadily. Nearly 40 percent of those students met the state standards this year, compared with 25.9 percent in 1999.

All of which underscores why the Scarsdale Moms and some Republican proposals to remove testing provisions are wrong ... and why legislation to gain accountability through testing is right.

* **CHARTERS:** Georgia law requires local school districts to treat charter schools "no less favorably than other local schools" when it comes to instructional and administrative funding, but that hasn't stopped DeKalb County school officials from providing Stone Mountain Charter School some 35 percent less funds than other county middle schools. Although their contract calls for receiving the amount of revenue earned from the full-time equivalent pupil count and appropriate local and federal

funds, the school has been forced to rely on credit and operate at a monthly deficit because full funding has not been forthcoming. The conflict illustrates the lengths to which local school districts will go to damage the ability of charter schools to survive. Left with no recourse, Stone Mountain is forced to use funds that would better be spent in the classroom in order to take the school system to court. The matter will be in DeKalb Superior Court May 23. Funding issues is one reason Georgia ranks 16th weakest of state charter laws, and without corrective action is likely to dip lower. You can review the [state charter rankings](#), or see what Stone Mountain does by going to <http://home.att.net/~kamoss11/index.SMCS.html>.

* **TEACHING:** A new survey released by the nonprofit teacher quality advocacy group Recruiting New Teachers Inc., shows that more than half of Americans believe the nation's teachers unions support high standards for teachers, but nearly 75% believe the unions stand in the way of getting rid of teachers who are truly incompetent. Eight out of ten Americans support removing unskilled teachers from the classroom if they are given extra training and still fail to measure up.

The survey, conducted by pollster Louis Harris and sponsored by the Ford Foundation and Washington Mutual, also shows that 87 percent of Americans think students are capable of learning more difficult subject matter, up 17 percent from a similar poll two years ago. Fewer than two in 10 Americans think teachers in their communities are highly qualified and more than one-third believe teachers nationally are only minimally competent or unqualified www.rnt.org.

SUPREME COURT AND CHOICE: Supreme Court Advocates for the Cleveland Scholarship program, which provides vouchers to needy children, are in the midst of filing briefs petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case on the program that the Sixth Circuit Court struck down on December 11 of last year. The issue is whether or not the state is allowed constitutionally to provide an alternative means of education for children stuck in failing schools. For more information, go to [www.edreform.com/school choice](http://www.edreform.com/school_choice) or www.ij.org

* **WINNERS:** Congratulations to the Charter School of Wilmington (DE), which became the first school to sweep both first and second place in the 25-year history of the state Science Olympiad. The teams head out to Colorado Springs, Colorado for the national competition this month.

* **PARENTS:** Be certain to check out the June issue of Parents Magazine, now on newsstands, for a great story about charter schools ... and why they offer a terrific option for parents. Having supplied a good deal of the information included in the report, we are delighted to see that they captured most of the key points and painted a generally positive picture of charters - including the history, key definitions, the advantages and what to look for in a school.

CORRECTION: Last week, CER reported that the recently passed charter legislation in Florida gives the state board the final word in charter appeals. While this final appeals language had been included in earlier versions of the bill, it is clear that the version that ultimately passed the state legislature does not contain language to this effect.



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